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Interviewer: My name is Alicia Mittelman, I'm the Curator of Education at the Estes Park Museum. Today is November 12, 2013 and we are in the Kimball/Wroblewski residence. We are going to interview Scott Kimball today, this is a joint effort between the Estes Valley Library and the Estes Park Museum for the Estes Valley Mountaineering Oral History Project. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with the assistance of Alicia Mittelman.]

What is your full name?

Scott Kimball: Scott Dale Kimball.

Interviewer: When and where were you born Scott?

Scott Kimball: I was born in 1949 in Boston, Massachusetts. I was named after, my mother and father went school at ASU [Arizona State University] in Phoenix and they met in Scottsdale, Arizona, so they named me Scott Dale. Isn't that kind of cute, the girls love that, that's how I got my middle name.

Interviewer: Do you have siblings?

Scott Kimball: I have my sister Lee, lives in Florida and my brother Randy, who's fifteen years younger than me, he lives in Ludlow, Massachusetts.

Interviewer: As a child were you pretty adventurous, did you play outdoors very much?

Scott Kimball: I was an outdoor guy, I kind of grew up in a kind of a semi-rural environment in a farming town, in western Massachusetts, Southwick. We had a lot of woods to play in and so it wasn't a city life and it wasn't rural, it was sort of in between.

Interviewer: When did you get introduced to rock climbing?

Scott Kimball: Only when I came to Estes Park in 1973. I moved here because a friend of mine who I went to high school with, George Hanken, this was during the Viet Nam War era. He was a conscientious objector and his duty was to work at the Y Camp of the Rockies for two years as a janitor. He came out here and he really liked it and he was my high school buddy. He got me out here, he said, "come out here, we've got skin' and climbin' and girls in the summer and all that kind of stuff, so it was kind of fun. So I came here in 1973. I think I might have started climbing the very first day I got here, cause we moved to "The Ranch" that's what we called it, we'll call it "Rock Side" [475 Wonderview Avenue] where Nathan [Araganbright] now lives. It was a house, we'll call it kind of a primitive cabin. None of the rooms had heat but the central room, there were four bedrooms and four guys lived there. The rent was \$50.00 a month, and split between four guys,

\$12.50 a month, was pretty easy to live there. There's a clutter garden on the outside, the back, it's just the back side of, I guess it's Castle Mountain, its just rocks everywhere. And the very first day I got into town, my friends were climbers and they took me out and I had hiking boots and a Boy Scout shirt and that kind of thing and we did some top ropes on some 5.3 thing and I kind of liked it.

Interviewer: Who were your roommates?

Scott Kimball: Steve Phipps, Freddy Syphax, George Hanken, the gentleman who got me out there, and K.C. Swanson who worked for the Park Service. They sort of rotated as years went on, but I lived there from '73 to '81. Fifty dollars a month until the old man Hix, who was the banker in town, he was elderly at the time. We just went down and paid him the money and he was kind of, we'll call it Alzheimer's or dementia . He didn't realize that fifty bucks a month, he thought that was a lot of money.

Interviewer: Are we talking about Charles Hix or George Hix or Frank?

Scott Kimball: Charles Hix, this is the father of the current Hix. They're in their 80s and 90s now. He was the first banker in town.

Interviewer: Other than a good deal on rent, what was the attraction to living at The Ranch?

Scott Kimball: Oh, I don't know. I try to think, we only had this one, there was a kerosene burner in the front room. That was the only heat we had. We all had to sleep in our sleeping bags in our little rooms, but the guys were all, most of them worked in the restaurant industry. Used to have big parties there and stuff. I kind of liked the bouldering out back. That's how I learned to climb, is go out and kind of scramble around on the rocks and then get a little more adventurous and do a little harder stuff. Hone your skills on those little rocks so you could climb on the bigger ones.

Interviewer: To be clear, The Ranch is off of Wonderview Avenue.

Scott Kimball: That's right, it's right west of the Stanley Mansion, next house west of the Stanley Mansion. Still owned by the Hix family and they own half of that mountain behind it too.

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Interviewer: And immediately behind the house there is an enormous rock garden. You mentioned bouldering there. There's opportunities for practicing your foot work on some of the more slabby rocks and there's also some cracks to practice on.

Scott Kimball: Oh yeah, you had I would say acres and acres of anything you wanted, all kind of Lumpy Ridge rough granite, cracks and slabs. You get lost back there, I call it the "clutter garden of rocks". Probably about fifty acres worth. If you walked directly north to the hill top you could look over on Lumpy Ridge and that was, McGregor

Ranch abutted the property. At the time McGregor Ranch in the 70s was still a working ranch. Wasn't this, I guess it wasn't this conservatory that it is now.

Interviewer: At that time was bouldering a popular discipline of rock climbing?

Scott Kimball: Kind of, people bouldered to learn their skills. You could always jump off, it was. But it wasn't popular like it is now, nobody had pads and bouldering magazines and websites to find all the boulders. So it wasn't popular really, but it was just kind of a fun thing to do on a half a day or if you didn't have anybody to climb with you could go up and play around. It's was a working cattle ranch at the time. That was the access to Lumpy Ridge, you had to go through the gate and close the gate, cause the cattle would get out. Muriel McGregor was some sort of eccentric, I don't know if I even met her. But we did meet the foreman and he didn't like climbers too much I don't think at the time. But for one reason, we had access through there because the Park owned all that land on Lumpy Ridge. And there was a ranger cabin up there, still is I guess.

Interviewer: I want to go back to that year, 1973 when you first came to Estes Park. You had a friend working here and you were immediately launched into rock climbing. Do you remember where your first climb was?

Scott Kimball: We climbed the rocks behind the Rock Side Cabin. Steve Phipps was sort of our leader at the time. He had been able to climb 5.8 and maybe 5.9. He had done Wolf's Tooth, that was a big thing. Wolf's Tooth on Twin Owls was like a, kind of a graduation climb into hard climbing. Two pitches, it was a hard crack climb, I guess it's rated 5.8 now. Then one of my first climbs, we did that and then maybe we went down to Eldorado [Canyon] and that was another Mecca of climbing. Eldorado and Lumpy Ridge is basically where I did a lot of my climbing.

Interviewer: Describe Lumpy Ridge to me.

Scott Kimball: Lumpy Ridge. Well you know the Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah, [Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah: A Rock Climber's & Scrambler's Guide to The Lumpy Ridge Area] the title of our first guide book that Chip Salaun and I co-authored, and that was the Arapahoe name for Lumpy Ridge. Apparently in 1914 they went up to the Wind River Ranch in Wyoming and grabbed some old time Arapahoes and they came around and they named things around town historically. They pointed out the Lumpy Ridge and said, "Well that's Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah, that's what we used to call it". What was that? That's "ridge with big lumps" I guess. Chip decided that was our title for the first guide book I wrote with him.

Interviewer: You're referencing the Toll Expedition when they spoke to the Arapahoes to gather names.

Scott Kimball: That's right, now what was it called?

Interviewer: The Toll.

Scott Kimball: The Toll, that's right. I guess they named several things, but Lumpy Ridge was one of their names. Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah was their translation.

Interviewer: How did you find out about that history of the Arapahos and their native names for the area?

Scott Kimball: I think that was common knowledge, there was a book at the time, the names of Rocky Mountain National Park. I think Chip had researched that, Chip Salaun my co-author of that guide book, he had researched that from the library. Like I say, he was sort of an interesting guy, an environmentalist, literary, he was a very literary guy, and a botanist.

09:59

Interviewer: Now correct me if I'm wrong. As I understand it, rock climbing in the region was mainly in the big mountains, the high peaks and Lumpy Ridge was somewhat considered as a training ground for these mountains.

Scott Kimball: I think you're right. I think that initially mountaineering was climbing mountains and little rocks or even big rocks was not considered mountaineering. It wasn't alpinism. But by the time I started climbing in the 70s, Eldorado and Lumpy Ridge and other areas, the South Platte, those were very popular with climbers.

Interviewer: Where did you set out to begin with climbing at Lumpy Ridge?

Scott Kimball: I think Twin Owls was our first rock that we aspired to, it was sort of like our El Cap [El Capitan], the Twin Owls is such a magnificent looking rock and sculpture just like owls and it's steep. It had a summit that you really couldn't obtain without rock climbing experience, so that sort of had a mountaineering aspect but Twin Owls was one of our favorites.

Interviewer: There are several routes on the Twin Owls today, which ones did you do in the early 70s?

Scott Kimball: I did a few first ascents there too. I climbed with, when I came to town we used to hang around at Komito's Shop that's now down where this Colorado Mountain School office is. I was kind of a newbie guy and I'd buy my shoes down at Komito's and he had a lot of the outdoor stuff down there. The guide service was there, Fantasy Ridge, and that was run by Michael Covington. He sort of took me under his wing a little bit and we'd go out and do routes and he was the first ascent kind of guy, he liked to do new routes. I did a few routes on Twin Owls with Michael, he'd show me the line and I got to lead them.

Interviewer: What kind of gear were you using at that point.

Scott Kimball: Oh the gear, yeah, I have that "klunkes" here that I want to show you, can I bring those out?

Unidentified Voice: We'll have to do it as a separate shot.

Scott Kimball: Ok, I used to buy our gear from either Outdoor World or REI, I guess REI's still in business. Just hexentrics and wired nuts.

Interviewer: When you were introduced to rock climbing, were you using hexes and nuts and sticky rubber shoes?

Scott Kimball: Now I started climbing right at the era of the end of the piton era and the start of the clean climbing ethics, the nuts and the wire stoppers. We didn't have sticky shoes at that point. Sticky shoes came in 1980 apparently, the rubber formula they put on shoes, Fire was the first sticky shoe and everybody had those, it was kind of a technological advancement.

Interviewer: What kind of footwear were you using in the 70s?

Scott Kimball: Let's see, the first shoe that I bought down at Komito's was this, it was a Galibier shoe, it was a French shoe. It was French and it was a stiff boot, black, it was Calcaire, it was my first pair of shoes. Calcaire as they were called made by Galibier. They were stiff, you couldn't bend them, they were like ice climbing boots now. So if stood on a little toe you could, you had to have pretty strong foot work. But we soon gave them up for EB's, that was another Galibier boot that was flexible. I have a pair that we could show you later, I've got an old EB. But they didn't have sticky rubber; they just had this hard rubber on it. I think the sticky rubber is oversold, I think was, it's the guy wearing the shoes; it's not the shoes themselves.

Interviewer: Beyond the Twin Owls, what did you set out to do next?

Scott Kimball: Well you know, Lumpy Ridge has I'd say a dozen major rocks. We used to tick them off, we'd go out to the Book or the Book End, or the Book Mark, the Pear, Sundance is the biggest rock out there. We probably hit them all.

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Interviewer: What was your process when you go up to a crag, do you look for the most obvious lines first or do you have another process?

Scott Kimball: Well we had a guide book at the time that was Walter Fricke, in the 70s he came out with a guide book, I should bring it out. So his guide book was pretty, it was Rocky Mountain National Park, it had Lumpy Ridge in it. It had most of the major rocks. You'd start off by climbing classics like if you went to the Book, you'd do Fat City, Osiris, these were known climbs already that Fricke or [Layton] Kor or the guides from the 60s put up. [Tom] Hornbein put up a few too. After a while you'd look around and you'd see that, wow there's 500 other climbs here that nobody's, no guide book has. We just started running up and down them. I'm kind of like a collector myself, as a kid I collected baseball cards and now I collect rocks and I collect stamps. I collect coins and I just started collecting climbs too, doing climbs.

Interviewer: What was your first priority, collecting first assents or writing a guide book?

Scott Kimball: I had to learn how to climb first, so you had to tag along with, you found a leader, somebody that had number one had a rope and had gear. And you found those guys first and the house I lived in at Rock Side, or The Ranch, had several guys that were leaders and you'd tag along with them. We'd do a climb and the leader would lead it and I would follow and take out the gear and maybe we'd do the climb again. Say like Organ Pipes on Twin Owls. I would follow the climb several times and see how the leader put the chocks and the nuts in for protection, saw how they made anchors, and I knew that I could, if I'd follow that climb a few times, I knew that I wasn't going to fall. I knew that I could do the climb and then that's how I started being a leader myself, just by being a follower for a while.

Interviewer: Who were some of your mentors?

Scott Kimball: The guys that I lived at the house with, Steve and George, Steve Phipps and George Hanken. Those were the guys that had the ropes and the gear and I kind of followed them around for a year.

Interviewer: What was their style like?

Scott Kimball: Well they were pretty conservative, considering nowadays. They would do the classic climbs and try to do them clean, not hanging on gear or aid, they would try to do it free.

Interviewer: In addition to following them up routes, how else did you gain knowledge about rock climbing?

Scott Kimball: Now the bouldering was the big thing too, you could just go out on your time off or afternoon and just get the physicalness of climbing. The physics of climbing, how many holds you could stand on and how hard you could pull, how high you could get without falling. Learn by doing, actually. They say you have to, your body gets this kinetic feel to it that after a while it knows what to do, it knows how to climb up without falling. So you have to develop that.

Interviewer: Were you pretty dedicated to training and that?

Scott Kimball: Not like this day and age where I went and did 50 pull ups and 50 pushups and went down to the gym. But we did a lot of climbing and this era in the 70s, it was a kind of, there was a bad recession going on in the late 70s. This was the post-Vietnam era and the Watergate era, there was not a lot of work around and so we could do a lot of climbing. If we lived at Rock Side, we could just walk to Lumpy Ridge. Didn't even have to own a car, and the first few years in town I couldn't afford a car. You could get a job in the summer maybe washing dishes or waiting tables or, this was even before the condo boom. I could remember in the middle of winter, there'd be one car parked down town at the Wheel and that was it. There was not a lot of things going on and there wasn't a lot of work, so you could do a lot of climbing.

Interviewer: What did you do to sustain a life up here?

Scott Kimball: Let me see, the first job I had in Estes Park was a dishwasher at the Coffee Bar which is one of these little places downtown, it's on the corner of Virginia and Elkhorn, it's a nick-knack shop now. So the first job I had was washing dishes at the Coffee Bar. [laughter] Then you know, summertime you could get a job, what other job did I have? The second year in town I got a job as the gardener at the Stanley. I got a job actually from Frank Normali who owned the Stanley; I was the gardener and the tour guide. He gave me a car and I would drive guests around the loop in the Park and point out the peaks, "This is Ypsilon, this is Longs Peak", and then I'd plant petunias and stuff like that. It was kind of a nice job.

20:08

Interviewer: Did you get into the Park to climb in addition to Lumpy Ridge?

Scott Kimball: Oh yeah, we, the Park once again. Fricke's book had all the big climbs. You had the Longs Peak and the Petit Grepon, and the Hallett's. That took a little more dedication and training to get up there. It took a few years before you graduated from a one pitch climb on Twin Owls to an eight pitch climb in the mountains on Hallett's or something. So it took a while to build yourself up to the bigger stuff.

Interviewer: You mentioned one of the guide books you had written. What inspired you and Chip to set out to write a guidebook?

Scott Kimball: Well Chip was a literary guy and we were both climbers and the former guide book was out of print, the "Fricke's Fables" we used to call it, Walter Fricke's book. It had been out of print for about ten years and there were hundreds of new climbs that were there already. Since we were locals, he had the literary bent, he was photographer too. I did a lot of the research and we decided that, let's do a new guidebook. At the time there wasn't a lot of guidebooks out there, our first guidebook, Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah, that I coauthored with Chip, I think it came out in '79, 1979. The old guidebook had been out of print for ten years, there were a lot of new climbs and I was just inspired to do it. It was kind of fun to do it.

Interviewer: How did you gather the information about first assents and pin pointing the exact locations of each route?

Scott Kimball: You just started with the old guide book and those routes and you added them to your collection and then any climbs you did, I used to take notes. Chip would take photographs and we'd ask some of the other locals around Komito's shop, for instance. At the guide shop at Fantasy Ridge and they were big first assenters too. Basically the locals would gather information and then we self-published this guidebook too in Ft. Collins and we sold it too. So it was basically a natural progression for me to start climbing here and then doing a lot of climbing and realizing that, "Wow, we could do a guidebook here because

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there's no guidebook any more, it's a very popular area, as a matter of fact it's a great area for rock climbing, it's one of the Meccas. Let's do a guidebook". Who else could do it but the guys who do all the climbing, that's what we thought.

Interviewer: How did you come to a consensus on the difficulty of a route?

Scott Kimball: Well you started from old grades. If the Wolf's Tooth was called 5.8, and the Tiger's Tooth was called 5.9, and the Crack of Fear was called 5.10, that's what your gauge was. And it was a consensus, like you'd ask some of the guys what they thought, how hard it was and what you thought, compared to the 5.8, the 5.9, and the 5.10. So it was a comparative thing.

Interviewer: Did that consume much of the conversation at The Ranch?

Scott Kimball: Not really, people really wanted to climb; they really didn't care about how hard it was. But there was accelerated amount of difficulty, and you're right. So once we got into the 5.11 range it was a little more debating of what was hard and what was 5.11 and what was 5.10, you're right.

Interviewer: What enabled climbers to push the limits of the difficulty level?

Scott Kimball: I think they were just, they were inspired by, I think the culture of climbing was really taking off in the '70s. Climbing was big in England and we used to have, I used to have a whole collection of Mountain Magazines, that was like the first climbing magazine. It was a British magazine. They had a section on rock climbing, they had a lot of alpinism too, but they had a section on rock climbing. By the '70s we had Climbing Magazine, an American magazine was published in Aspen, "The Free Climbing" it was called. Not aid climb but free climb was really taking off and Eldorado was a Mecca. People from all over the world would come to Eldorado and the Diamond was a big Mecca too. So it was taking off.

Interviewer: You have at least 144 first ascents, the majority of those being free climbs.

Scott Kimball: I think they all are free climbs.

Interviewer: They all are. Why was that an important ethic of yours?

Scott Kimball: I think when we started climbing here in the '70s, I would go out to Lumpy Ridge with my Fricke's guidebook and I'd see, for instance Batman Rock and Checkerboard Rock and lot of these other smaller rocks, weren't even in the guidebook, they didn't even have a name. So we'd just started climbing on them and said, "Well gees, look at this beautiful rock, nobody's ever climbed here", it might only be 200 feet high, but it's got five or six very nice lines and we just started climbing them.

Interviewer: What did it feel like to be one of the very first people ever up there?

Scott Kimball: I guess I was lucky to be here at the right time to do the right climbs. Plus it was kind of exciting to do it too, and by the time I had been climbing for three or four years, I was pretty fit. I was in my thirties and it was all I could think about was climbing, climbing was big.

Interviewer: How did you communicate your passion for climbing to people who didn't rock climb?

Scott Kimball: We didn't even care about the people who didn't rock climb. It's all about climbing. [laughter] But it was taking off, Boulder was a center of climbing and there were guidebooks to High Over Boulder and Erickson had his Rocky Heights guidebook. So climbing was a world unto itself at that time.

Interviewer: Can you walk me through the subsequent guidebooks that you authored?

Scott Kimball: Sure, my first guidebook I wrote, co-authored with Chip Salaun, that was Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah, we came out in 1979. We self-published that, took us about a year to do the research. Chip did all the photography and he had a dark room down on Cleave Street, he lived on Cleave Street. He had a little darkroom and I did a lot of the actual climbing and research and we put it together. We got it self-published, we had 4,000, we had the first edition was 4,000 books and that sold out in about two years. That book came out in '79 and at that time the climbing really took off around here and four years later I decided that, "I'm going to upgrade the guidebook, Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah for a new guidebook. And at the time Chip had gone on to other things and I teamed up with Annegret my wife did the illustrations and I started doing the photography and I had a black room also, where Chip does down on Cleave Street, and I did all the black and whites. It was quite a nice project, Annegret helped me a lot and I had several other gentlemen help choreograph some of the climbs and stuff. So the second guidebook I came out with I did it through Chalkstone Press which was down in Denver. That was published in 1985, I believe. Chalkstone Press paid me several thousand dollars in advance to do the book and that was big money back then. I could spend almost all summer climbing with my little royalty money. That was 5,000, we had about 5 to 6,000 in the first edition. I never did do a second edition on that.

06:10

Interviewer: Tell me about Solitary Summits.

Scott Kimball: Well this was like a little guidebook I did that was about the rocks up on Twin Sisters called "The Craggs". Our first guidebook that Chip and I did, Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah did not include the Craggs, for whatever reason, I don't know why. It wasn't very popular; there was some issues with access at the time. The Park Service did not own that area at the time. Lilly Lake was a private area and there were some Texans that owned the property and they didn't like climbing. So never the less, the Craggs weren't very popular, cause you couldn't go there, you had to trespass to get there, even though it was pretty majestic looking rocks. So I decided, cause I loved the Craggs, used to always go up there. I said, "We're going to do a little

guidebook to the Craggs”, I was on this guidebook kick now. I guess I was a prototype professional climber at the time, I did guidebooks, I worked as a guide for Fantasy Ridge and then the first year of Colorado Mountain School I was a guide, wrote articles for climbing magazines. So I was kind of a prototype professional climber, I was making my living, albeit a very small living as a climber. So guidebooks were another way to make a little income.

Interviewer: The fourth publication called the “Longs Peak Free Climber”, tell me about that.

Scott Kimball: Well that was something I did with a gentleman, Gary Sapp who was a printer down in Ft. Collins. We decided that I was going to do an article about the Diamond. That came out in 1984 and the Diamond at the time, in the early ‘70s, the Diamond was like an aid climbing area. People never free climbed on the Diamond, it was just aid climbing. But after Duncan Ferguson and Chris Reveley did a free ascent on the Diamond, and I think maybe Goss and Logan too, they did several free ascents. And it kind of opened the door up to climbing on the Diamond, free climbing. Maybe in the course to four or five years I did eight or nine routes up on the Diamond, no first ascents, but I did a lot of climbing on the Diamond and so did a lot of the locals. It became a world class area, actually the world class alpine wall in America, was the Diamond. So the thought that “Wow, I could do a guidebook of free climbing on the Diamond, why not? I’ve got to pump out these guidebooks to make some money”. So we decided that we were going to do this and I kind of liked the idea that it was on the water proof paper and it was a fold thing and kind of innovative. I didn’t sell that many of them though.

Interviewer: In the back of your book you list gear and repair shops like Komito Boots and guiding services like CMS [Colorado Mountain School]. You also listed health food stores and can you tell me about when climbers started to take a holistic approach to diet and training with their climbing?

Scott Kimball: [Chuckles] I know that in my early days I was so poor that all I’d eat was peanut butter and celery. I don’t know how holistic climbers were at the time, there was still a lot of alcohol and marijuana involved with climbing, even back then. We weren’t into the gym thing, but like I say we, I think I ate, I was sort of a vegetarian. Not so much because, I really couldn’t afford meat at the time. So peanut butter was our staple, I guess that’s considered health food now.

10:09

Interviewer: At the time that you wrote your books, what was the climbing culture like?

Scott Kimball: I think the climbing culture back then was even more involved than it is now. Obviously there are more climbers in town and in Boulder and this part of Colorado, but I think climbing was more kind of a secret society maybe or maybe an elitist sport. Climbing was considered by the general public as kind of nuts. “What are these guys doing up there on that cliff?” We used to think of it as the ultimate survival sport, climbing and ice climbing and alpinism. Because you had

to take everything in on your back and you didn't have cell phones. You had to do your own rescue if there was problems. I think it was more exciting back then than it is now. Now it's so commercialized I believe.

Interviewer: I have an article you wrote from Mountain Adventure Magazine in 1983. It describes a winter ascent of Pagoda's West Ridge Falls. In it you describe "A fresh blanket of snow slows the drive to Glacier Gorge parking lot. The trailhead is obliterated by yesterday's storm. We start skiing right from the car, usually skiing is fun, but this, breaking trails for seven miles, tackling steep alpine slopes and carrying 40 pound loads somehow lacks the grace and effortless motion. It is just plain hard work."

Scott Kimball: I think we probably build a snow cave below Pagoda and hauled in the. Have you ever lived in a snow cave, it's kind of neat. It never gets colder than 30 degrees and it never gets warm either. So I think we took that big packs in there and we made a snow cave below Pagoda and did the climb the next day and skied out. After a while I really enjoyed climbing in the mountains more than the Lumpy Ridge and stuff but the seasons short. The season was short and did a lot of routes on Hallett's and the Cathedral Spires and did a bunch of climbs. The Diamond was the big thing. The Diamond was our peak, or Mecca, the Diamond. That's where I did my little guidebook on the Diamond. I did probably seven or eight routes, free routes on the Diamond, was pretty lucky to get up them all.

Interviewer: Why was the Diamond your Mecca?

Scott Kimball: They say that Longs Peak is sort of a vortex of energy. It is a very majestic looking peak and that diamond shaped wall up there, it sort of had a draw for us. You could see it from almost anywhere in town. I really think there is a lot of energy up there. Some sort of vortex up there. Wanted to tap into that I guess.

Interviewer: Have you lived in Estes Park consistently since 1973?

Scott Kimball: No, I haven't. I came here in 1973 and then in 1984 I married Annegret and we had a child, Uri, and we moved back east because at the time climbing wasn't, I couldn't make a living climbing anymore. It's kind of like a bachelor thing, like a ski guide or a climbing guide. You really couldn't make a living as a father and a family. I moved back east and lived in the town that I grew up in, in western Massachusetts, Southwick with my wife. And I went to school and I upgraded and retooled as a registered nurse. But we came back in 1997 and I've been still climbing ever since. That's when we really got into climbing at the Craggs, 1997. So I haven't been here continually.

Interviewer: Tell me about the Craggs.

Scott Kimball: I moved into this house and my next door neighbor was Tim Hansen and he was a very good climber and he was sort of a sport climber. The difference between sport climbing is more climbing bolted routes, equipping routes with bolts and an anchor and climbing with bolts as your protection. In sport climbing was starting to take off then in the late '80s. Tim and I, and it was Tim's sort of idea, "Let's go

up the Craggs and let's start putting up routes at the Craggs, bolted routes. There was a perfect spot to go because there was hardly any natural lines at the Craggs and a lot of steep vertical faces. The rock is nice so it's horizontally banded but there's not a lot of vertical cracks and it's perfect for making sports climbs. So I think Tim and I and my son Uri and a few other gentlemen, Doug Snively for one, we put up about 50 or 60 sport climbs up there in about a five year period. And now I guess it's taken off, people have really gone up there now, the Sea Cresses of Beta [?], a 5.14 up there that brings hundreds of people a week up there in the summer.

15:45

Interviewer: How did the climbing community in Estes Park respond to bolting?

Scott Kimball: Now once again, I was gone from '84 to '97 and that's when the bolting controversies and wars evolved. So I kind of missed out on that. By the time I got back to Estes Park in 1997 it was pretty much considered, sports climbing was ok. They'd run out of natural crack climbs to do and that was sort of a natural progression, sport climbing, bolted climbs. So I missed out on all the controversy in that. I guess there was some chopping of bolts and bolt wars. More so in Boulder.

Interviewer: How did it change over the years using guidebooks for information as opposed to electronic forums like the Mountain Project today?

Scott Kimball: I guess, the Mountain Project, that's right. It's kind of sanitized now, the Mountain Project thing. When it first came on line, I don't know when it was, people could anomalously make comments, it was quite the social network. Now it's pretty sanitized, you can't say anything, you can't say "boo" or anything. Guidebooks are sort of passé now, aren't they almost? Now guide books have turned to coffee table books with colored photos and a lot of the information is on the internet, you're right.

Interviewer: Do you participate in forums?

Scott Kimball: I used to, I've grown out of it for some reason. I think that a lot the, like the Mountain Project stuff for instance, is not advancing the sport at all. It's kind of trashing areas by overpublicizing them I should think.

Interviewer: What used to advance the sport?

Scott Kimball: Well I think the big gear companies and the rope companies, and now there's a whole crop of professional climbers and competitions in gyms. I think gyms are the big thing. In the last 15 years the gym climbing has advanced the sport where people learn at a young age to climb on the plastic in the gyms. That has brought a lot of people into the sport.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you guided for a little while, who did you guide for?

Scott Kimball: The first year that Colorado Mountain School was in existence, in the '70s the guide service was Fantasy Ridge, Michael Covington's business. He sold it in 1983 to Michael Donahue and I was one of the first guides who worked for Michael Donahue. He had the concession to the Park on Lumpy Ridge. Most of the stuff I did was just take people out to Rock One, a little rock next to Twin Owls and take them out for a half day and make \$53.00. Fifty three dollars, that's what the half day fee was for the guide, you were lucky to get a tip. Maybe somebody would take you down to the Surrey and they'd buy you a hamburger.

Interviewer: Any memorable moments as a guide?

Scott Kimball: I got to the point where I didn't care for guiding that much. Basically you're taking strangers out to climb and it got to be work. When climbing was work it kind of lost its allure to me, I didn't care for it that much.

19:51

Interviewer: Over the years how did you find your climbing partners?

Scott Kimball: I guess we kind of gravitate to each other. My first climbing partner after living at Rock Side with the guys up there, I met Michael Neary, he was another gung-ho kid from Rhode Island. He was my first climbing partner and then he unfortunately died on Longs Peak on a winter accident, that was sad. But the climbing partners just came; there was always climbers that came to Estes Park, mostly in the summer. I climbed with quite a few people. The partners were, it was something you almost had to have if you wanted to climb hard. You had to have a partner with you. You had to have a partner that was also dedicated to climbing. I climbed with a gentleman for several years, did a lot of first ascents, Carl Harrison. He lived in town here, he was a British gentleman. His father climbed with Joe Brown, a famous British climber. He had a tradition of climbing. I climbed with Carl for quite a few years. He went on to live in the Himalayas, he still does. He has a Himalayan guide service there and I climbed with a gentleman, Bill Wylie who is a photography professor at the University of Virginia. It was always pretty easy to find climbing partners. Pretty easy to find climbing partners, you could just kind of go down to the Colorado Mountain School and hang out there and there'd be a lot of climbing partners. You could almost pick and choose who you wanted to climb with. You'd always pick friends that you liked, you became good friends.

Interviewer: Did you have any close calls?

Scott Kimball: I was lucky in a way, I always tell people that, one of my saving graces, I never injured myself. I never got injured. Once I sprained my ankle so something. Other people have of course been unlucky with climbing, so I say, "The biggest thing that keeps you going is to keep injury free." Of course we had close calls, lightning strikes. I never really had any big falls where I hurt myself or anything. So I got very lucky in that respect.

Interviewer: I want to talk with you about motivation. You have been involved in a tremendous amount of route development as we mentioned before. At least

22:43 [End of Part B.]

[C].

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145 routes. How did you go about finding a new crag and what if anything do you think they have in common with each other?

Scott Kimball: I think we were motivated, I was always motivated by doing new climbs. Once my skill level got to the point where I could climb 5.11, there was a lot of climbs I could do. I felt almost that we were at the peak of our performance, the tip of the spear, we thought that. That kind of motivated me to be in the forefront. Even just for a short little time. I wasn't the greatest climber by any means and I had a lot of friends that were legendary climbers. Jimmy Dunn or Billy Westbay, they were legendary almost and I was hanging out with those guys. So I felt that aura that awe. Just for a short time though. It goes away and then you get to be old fatter, a family man.

Interviewer: And here you are, continuing to

Scott Kimball: I little bit, I still enjoy it. My son, see that helped me too. My son grew up, of course he, initially when he was at Jr. High and that era, he didn't want to do what his parents liked. We liked climbing so he didn't want to do that, but eventually when he came to Estes Park and he did his four years of high school here and he graduated in 2011. Excuse me, 2001. He joined the gym team and he got into the gym thing and I did a lot of climbing with my son too which was a lot of fun cause I could get out of the house. I didn't have to explain to my wife where I was going, "I'm taking the kid out climbing". It was perfect, so we did a lot of climbing at the Craggs. We'd go to Shelf Road, he was more of a sport climber and he turned into a boulderer. So it was fun to have my son as a climbing partner for a while. Good excuse to get out every weekend.

Interviewer: In addition to having somebody to belay you, what does it mean to see your son Uri climb?

Scott Kimball: He was good, he was much better than me. I wish he'd take it up more but he realized quick that climbing is like a little, just a little shot in the dark. Then it's not really real life anymore and you can't really climb hard for very long. So he, I guess he's gone on to other things.

Interviewer: Do you have predictions for what the climbing scene will be like in the future?

Scott Kimball: I don't know what the climbing. It seems like they just are getting harder and harder climbs. It's just fun to read about it in the climbing magazines. I guess all the hard climbs, of course we have a whole crop of professional climbers now.

That's all they do is climb, they're sponsored to climb. So they are going to take the difficulties to higher heights, I'm sure.

Interviewer: You mentioned leaving Estes Park for a brief period of time and then coming back. What is so captivating about climbing in the Estes Valley and Rocky Mountain National Park?

Scott Kimball: When I left Estes, I got married and I had to retool and get a new profession. I always wanted to come to Estes, back to Estes. It was sort of my, basically Estes was where I discovered myself and what I liked to do and I didn't want to be away from it that long. I didn't want to live in an Eastern city or anything like that.

Interviewer: Today, what is your community of climbing partners like?

Scott Kimball: Well I climb a little bit with my son still, on Father's Day, he gets to get me out on Father's Day maybe. But then I climb with some of the older guys like Douglas Snivley and then there's a few young guys I climb with a little bit. The climbing community is a little more, it's not as, well I'm an older gentleman now, of course. The climbing community seems not as holistic as it used to be back in the old days. I guess we could go down to the gym and hang out, I'm sure I'd meet a lot of new climbers down at the local gym.

04:40

Interviewer: Do you have any memories of climbing in a gym?

Scott Kimball: [laughing] The Trail Ridge Outfitters had a gym, it was before the Mountain Shop, down by the dam, had a gym. I don't know, gym climbing is a lot of fun, it's a good thing to keep you fit in the winter, it's all I can think.

Interviewer: I'm just thinking it must have been a big contrast to having been introduced to climbing at Lumpy Ridge and Castle Mountain right off the bat.

Scott Kimball: Well, it's an evolution, gyms bring a lot of people into climbing and it's a good way to meet people. I guess a town like Boulder has four or five gyms now. By the way I get free passes down there now. I guess CMS owns one of the gyms down there, Boulder Rock Club. I told one of the girls I work with whose husband is the gym manager that I was a guide the first year CMS was in operation, so I got a few free passes to the gym. I haven't been down there yet though.

Interviewer: Pioneering has its perks.

Scott Kimball: I guess, yeah.

Interviewer: Are there any last stories you'd like to share.

Scott Kimball: No, let me think, let me think, stories. I guess I've been lucky that I've had these good people to climb with, adventurous people to climb with and people that were safe. We got through it alive. That's all I can think of at the time.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Scott Kimball: Well thank you.

06:28 [End of Part C. End of Interview.]

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ABSTRACT Scott Kimball's distinguished climbing career included climbing, route development, guiding, authoring climbing related guidebooks, and writing magazine articles. Scott began climbing in the Estes Park area in 1973 and is credited with an impressive 145 first ascents as free climbs. He researched, photographed, graded climbs, and then authored four different guide books as listed following this abstract. His writing has also been featured in different climbing magazines. Scott was a guide for both Fantasy Ridge and the Colorado Mountain School. This interview also describes the development of sport climbing especially at the Crags and reflects upon the transition from guide books to modern electronic climbing forums.

Thath-Aa-Ai-Atah - A Rock Climber's and Scrambler's Guide to the Lumpy Ridge Area, authored with Chip Salaun, 1980; Lumpy Ridge and Estes Park Rock Climbs, 1986; Solitary Summits, A Climber's Guide to the Less Visited Rocks of Rocky Mountain National Park, Roosevelt National Forest, Estes Park, CO, illustrated by Annegret Wroblewski, 1982; Longs Peak Free Climber, 1984.

Note: Added material appears in brackets.

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